

Chapter 15

A PERCEPTION-BASED STUDY: CHINESE FILIPINOS' RESPONSE TO CHINA'S COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES

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Introduction

As different nations struggle to fight against COVID-19, opinions on how China handles its COVID-19 preventive measures runs in the contrast between criticism and admiration. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, Americans expect China's international reputation to suffer because of how the country has handled the coronavirus outbreak (Silver 2020). People around the globe are divided in their opinions of how China implemented measures such as provincial lockdown and its strict surveillance system. In the Philippines, Chinese Filipinos are caught in the same predicament.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of the Chinese Filipinos in China's manner of combating COVID-19.

More than 80 percent of the Chinese outside China live in Southeast Asia and in the Philippines, approximately two percent of its population is home to the Chinese Filipinos. Their affinity to China is evidenced by the existence of the world's oldest Chinatown and culturally mixed community. In this study, the Chinese-Filipino community is the target audience for an online survey conducted on March 1-10, 2020. The result demonstrated that the Chinese Filipino, as a minority group, is divided in their assessment of China's performance. A crucial factor relates to the role of language that illustrates a strong relationship to media preference which impacts one's perceived narrative resulting in divided sentiments.

COVID-19 and China's Containment Measures

Hubei, China – with a population of more than 60 million and a land area 4.5 times that of The Netherlands – was placed in lockdown with full or partial travel restrictions across its 15 cities by the end of January. This draconian measure and the unprecedented scale of response have been China's firm steps to control the spread of the virus. This comes after more than a month's delay in acknowledging the spread of the virus and the possible further damage it can cause to the lives of more people. Two brand new hospitals were hastily constructed in Wuhan to aid its overstretched healthcare system while an additional 1,200 health workers were dispatched to help aid the possible collapse of its healthcare system (Griffiths 2020). China also created a coronavirus tracking app that requires its citizen to sign up in a color-coded health system.

The World Health Organization (WHO) may have lauded the efforts of the Chinese government in curbing the virus, but China's measures were insufficient to curb the outbreak of COVID-19. As China continues to contain the spread of the virus, other nations

start to see cases of COVID-19 cases among its citizens. By March 12, the director-general of WHO declared that the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, has become a global concern and its threat of a global pandemic has become a reality. Indeed, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic – with its epicenter in Wuhan, China – started to spread quickly throughout the world (Wang, et al. 2020).

By April 30, WHO records 31,99,277 confirmed cases with 226,790 deaths. As there is no vaccine available, finding the best preventive measure and approach to battle the infection is the ultimate goal of each affected nation. Besides practicing good hygiene and social distancing, we look at measures like strict surveillance and provincial lockdown implemented by the Chinese government as a possible model. From an authoritarian system, compliance is the rule of thumb; but for a democratic system like the Philippines, a lockdown can mean curtailing of freedom.

The Philippines, being a democratic country whose governance design was adopted from the United States, holds the value of free mobility and the idea of a total lockdown is a foreign and autocratic move as it compounds issues related to freedom of mobility or freedom of company and establishment to operate. Shut down of business establishments can also create a domino principle of possible retrenchment, adding to further damage. Creating a surveillance system such that of a tracking device is yet another issue deemed in violation of the Data Privacy Act. On the other hand, the quick containment of COVID-19 in China is impressive and sets an encouraging example for other countries to emulate. Its aggressive public health interventions combined with a technologically driven contact tracing greatly contributed to the delay of the spread of COVID-19. These are just a few of the contrasting opinions that envelope disagreements among the Chinese-Filipino community. With varied opinions and reasoning

torn between two opposite ends of the spectrum provide for an opportunity to run this study among the Chinese Filipinos.

Who are the Chinese Filipinos?

A Chinese Filipino can refer to all Chinese people in the Philippines regardless of nationality or place of birth. It can refer to Chinese people with Philippine nationality, and Chinese people with Chinese nationality but have legally resided in the Philippines for some time. The broad spectrum of being identified as Chinese Filipino in the Philippines can be attributed to the long history of interaction between the Chinese and the Philippines.

According to *Sung Shi (History of the Sung Dynasty)*, published in 1343-1374, China already had trade relations with the people in the Philippines as early as the 10th century (AD 982) and Chinese colonies arise in different parts of the archipelago during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). During the Spanish colonization, despite turbulent years due to massacres of 1603, 1639, and 1662, and the Expulsion Act of 1755, the Chinese manage to integrate themselves in the Philippine society and this gave rise to the Chinese mestizo. By 1741, the Chinese mestizos have been recognized as a distinct element in the Philippine society, and by the year 1800, Comyn recorded a total of 120,621 Chinese mestizo from a total Philippine population of 2,527,298, representing around five percent of the entire population (Wickberg 1964, 62).

When the United States occupied the Philippines, events in China – such as the Taiping Rebellion, Civil War, and Boxer Rebellion – led thousands of Chinese to migrate to the Philippines. The majority of the Chinese who arrive at the shore are from Fujian province and have relatives who came earlier to work as coolies or house servants. The 1903 census indicated that in Manila alone

44.4 percent of Chinese were hired as cooks for wealthy Americans (Martínez and Lowrie 2012, 511). While this is an ongoing reality, in the same year, the exclusion act in the United States was extended in the Philippines and refused further entry of the Chinese. Being excluded as a minority group, the lucky Chinese that manage to stay in the Philippines turned inward culturally and established institutional linkages like Chinese schools, Chinese Chambers of Commerce, and Chinese newspapers. These groups formed another big population of Chinese Filipinos.

By 1972, the Chinese Filipinos were estimated at roughly 600,000, which included 150,000 China-born or alien Chinese and 450,000 Philippine-born Chinese (McCarthy 1974, 232). The Marcos administration was a turning point for the Chinese-Filipino community for this starts the real assimilation of the Chinese in Philippine society. A closure order of Chinese newspapers and the eventual reduction of Chinese subjects in place of a Filipino subject was implemented. In 1975, the Philippines formally established ties with the People's Republic of China and the Mass Naturalization Law was passed, providing a path to Philippine citizenship to the Chinese-Filipino community. Since then, integration became a natural phenomenon and rapid assimilation of many Chinese happens in Philippine society.

Eventually, the Tsinoy came into being. "Tsinoy" is a colloquial term for Tsinong Pinoy or Chinese Filipinos and refers to Chinese who is a mix of both worlds, that of being a Chinese and a Filipino. The Tsinoy are known to have preserved the Chinese customs and traditions while adopting the Filipino way of life. Most of them speak fluent Tagalog, better English, and to a few minorities, a good command of Mandarin.

Indeed, the history of the Chinese in the Philippines has come a long way in history but it is to be noted that the appearance of the local-born second generation had been delayed until the end of World War II due to various policies implemented by Spanish and

American regimes against the Chinese. The usual practice then by many Chinese migrants from Fujian province was to leave behind their families in China; the sons were brought to the Philippines only when they are old enough to help with the family business or enterprise that the father has established in the Philippines. These young entrepreneurs join the Philippine society mostly as young adults. This can help us further understand different dimensions of being part of the Chinese-Filipino community wherein there is still quite a number whose first language is Chinese rather than Tagalog.

Adding to this phenomenon are the different waves of Chinese that continuously arrive in the Philippines before the turn of the century. The establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade (AFTA) in 1992 to eliminate barrier tariff among its member countries eventually brought forth the idea of East Asian Integration, namely “ASEAN plus China.” Although aggressive marketing and promotions were made especially among East Asian markets to project the Philippines as a major tourist destination and retirement destination, the Philippines still lags behind its Southeast Asian neighbors in terms of volume of arrivals (Rodolfo 2003). However, given the existence of a strong network of overseas Chinese, the Philippines sustain a good number of foreign Chinese investments and business ventures. Besides, when the Philippines dropped its trade balancing program with China in the 1990s, this allowed for the issuance of multiple-entry visas of Chinese national, this also provided for relaxed visa procedures providing visa extension and validity for temporary entry up to 59 days. Many Chinese, especially from Fujian and Guangzhou took advantage of such benefits and visited the Philippines.

According to Guéguen (“New Migrants” 2012), a Chinese tourist eventually add to the list of economic migrants mostly helped by Chinese Filipinos themselves, from being employed in a friend’s company or by hiring them for odd jobs requiring

their linguistic skills or their connection with China. Given the flexible visa procedure to travel to the Philippines, a tourist visa for three-week can be extended from months to years by corrupt officials for a few thousands of pesos. This period also recorded a good number of Chinese who managed to get themselves the proper visa such as Special Investment Visa (SIV) or the Special Retirement Visa (SRV).

An article from *SunStar Philippines* mentioned that the Chinese nationals topped the Philippine Retirement Agency's (PRA) list of foreign retirees in the Philippines. From 1985 to 2016, the agency's data show that there are 17,768 Chinese retirees, approximately around 34 percent of the total foreign retirees. Guéguén observed that a comparable difference among these new waves of immigrants in comparison from the migration waves of 1930s is that the Chinese no longer leave their homeland alone but are generally accompanied by their relatives ("New Migrants" 2012). The arrival of new migrants accompanied by families help in the renewal of the local Chinese community by strengthening education, clan, and language-oriented activities towards China. It contributes to the revival of the traditional business networks of occupying old business hubs surrounding the Chinatown areas. The different waves of Chinese migrants that settled in the Philippines contribute to the multiple facets and plurality in the identity of being considered a Chinese Filipino.

Method and Data

The online survey consisted of 18 questions with 12 major questions about different dimensions of how participants' perceived China's response in fighting COVID-19 and the eventual aftermath of such manner of action vis a vis their position as a citizen of the Philippines. Other questions were used to profile the

participants. The survey questionnaire was a combination of the five-point Likert scale and multiple-choice questions. The survey was conducted from March 1-10, 2020 and received a total of 439 participants. The preferred language (Chinese or English) in answering the same set of questionnaires stands as the dependent variable for the study. Preferred language was chosen as a variable to give equal opportunity to participants since the Chinese-Filipino community was represented by different generations and waves of migrants. This study deployed a content analysis method for data analysis. Correspondingly, data were analyzed using SPSS software.

The characteristics of the study population came from a total of 439 online participants. The highest number of English-language respondents came from the age group of 46.50 percent while 25.60 percent of respondents came from the age group of 46 years old and above. The age group of 35 to 45 years old had a total of 18.60 percent while the 25 to 34 years group had 9.30 percent. The Chinese-language respondents followed a descending pattern, oldest age bracket of 46 years and above participated the most at 41 percent. This was followed by ages 35 to 45 with a total of 31.40 percent. The age group from 25 to 34 years old came next with 14.10 percent, followed by the age group 18 to 24 years old with 12.80 percent. The least number of participants belonged to the age group 18 years old and below with a total of .60 percent (see Table 1).

Table 1.

	Below 18 years old	18-24 years old	25-34 years old	35-45 years old	46 years old and above
English-language Respondents	0.00%	46.50%	9.30%	18.60%	25.60%
Chinese language Respondents	0.60%	12.80%	14.10%	31.40%	41.00%

The education level of respondents listed at 95.5 percent for those who finished the tertiary level of schooling while only four percent belonged to the secondary level, and with as little as 0.5 percent for primary level. According to the occupation, a large majority of participants came from the student sector with a total of 44.20 percent. This was followed by a group of professionals (journalists, teachers, doctors, authors, engineers, lawyers) with a total of 27.90 percent; 14 percent were businessmen and self-employed; those who have other jobs not specifically mentioned were at 11.60 percent. The lowest participants (2.30 percent) came from other sectors like government employees (see Figure 1).

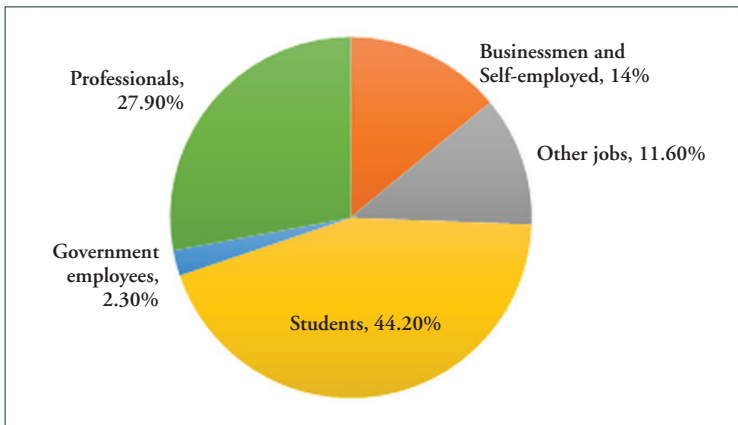


Figure 1. Participants' Occupation

Profiling further on participants' work involvement, a question to find out if they work in a Chinese community is part of the survey. A little over half of the English language respondents work in a Chinese community with 55.80 percent, with only 15.40 percent of the Chinese language respondents work in a Chinese community.

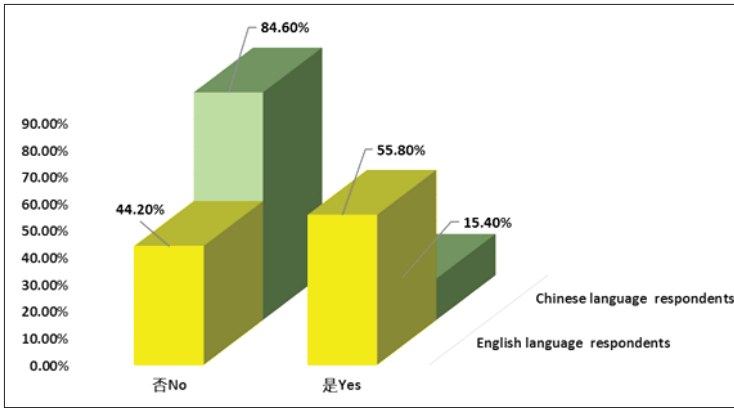


Fig. 2. Do You Work in a Chinese Community?

Results and Discussions

The use of preferred language (English or Chinese) as a variable shows an obvious contrast in the use of social media platforms. On the question “Which channel do you generally obtain information related to the COVID-19 pandemic,” 79.1 percent of English respondents said they receive their COVID-19 information from international social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter while 80.1 percent of Chinese respondents answered WeChat and Weibo, both of which are Chinese online media platforms. Other mass media outlets did not gather as much percentage as the use of social media platforms, but Fig. 3 clearly showed that the second preferred source of media information among English respondents is a local English-language media outlet (65.20 percent). A similar pattern can be drawn from the Chinese respondents, ranking 62.80 percent, on other media in China as their secondary source of media information. An opposite trend can also be seen with Chinese participants getting the least information from local

English language media (7.70 percent). Ranking the least among the English-language respondents were derived from Chinese media in China and its social media platforms both ranked 18.60 percent.

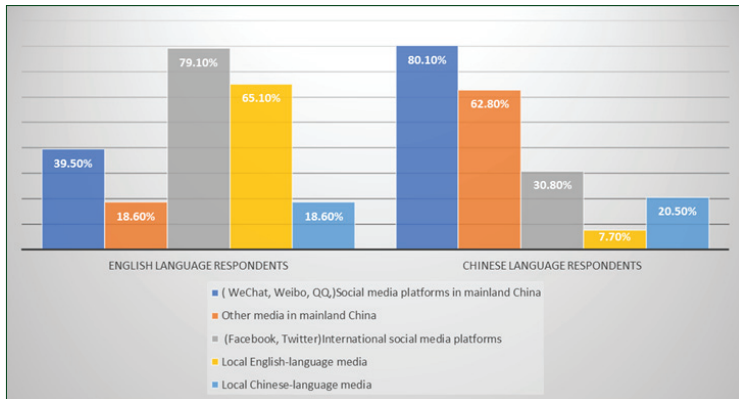


Fig. 3. Preferred Media Outlet

Survey results from the use of media platform indicate that the use of the native language is very much related to the use of home country media. The survey also showed that the choice of language reflects media consumption which provides an avenue for cultural dispersion as a result of the media process. Consciously or not, the use of social media has become an integral part of our everyday lives consuming our very identity and social relationship. It plays a key role in how we understand the world around us and how we perceive things in action, such is the case in gathering this survey information related to China's COVID-19 preventive measures.

To evaluate how participants' perceived control measures such as lockdown and surveillance system employed by China's Central Government in its pandemic prevention, the five-point

Likert scale was adopted. Those who responded using the English questionnaire believe measures done by the Chinese government are good and scored their highest at 37.2 percent; those who responded using the Chinese questionnaire presented higher confidence on the preventive measures done by the Chinese government and scored 84.6 percent for very good performance. While both groups of participants gave a positive remark, the graph showed a very low percentage of negative feedback (1.30 percent) followed by a steep upward trajectory of positive feedback (84.60 percent) from Chinese-language respondents. The case is not as drastic with the English language respondents, which show a gradual increase from 14 percent negative response to 27.90 percent positive response (see Fig. 4).

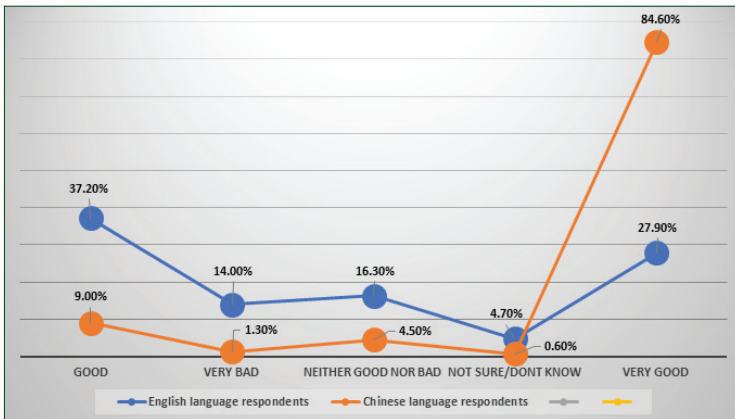


Fig. 4. China's Covid-19 Preventive Measures

On a scale level survey for China's overall Anti-Pandemic Measures, still evident on a high scale of 10 can be found among Chinese language respondents (75.50 percent.) while the English language respondents gave a similar percentage of 20.9 percent at Scale 8 and 9 (see Fig. 5).

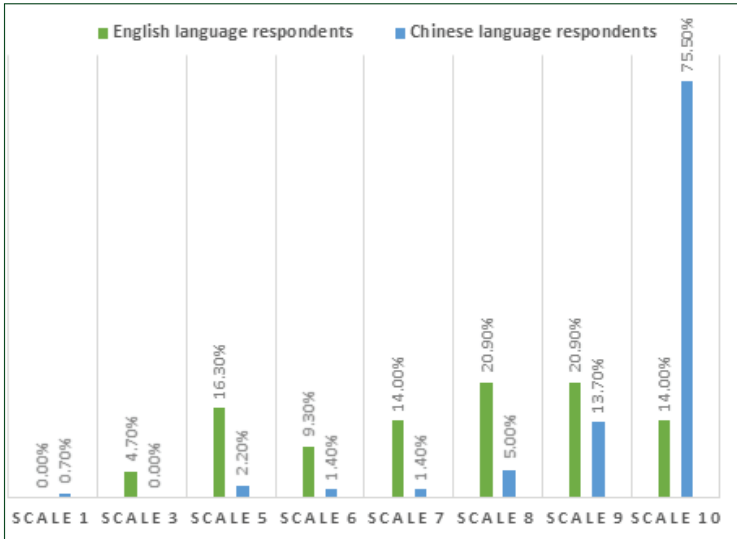


Fig. 5. Effectiveness of China's Anti-Pandemic Measures

The survey result from China's Anti-Pandemic Measures revealed a higher level of agreement and acceptance from Chinese respondents in comparison with the English respondents. Linking the survey result pattern can point us to the role that social media have played being the highest source of information for each respective group of participants. The level of information taken in does reveal the subconscious role media can play as a silent influencer in accepting a certain narrative that can influence one's public opinion.

The question on how COVID-19 can affect China's national image was quite revealing. English-language respondents (72.1 percent) believe that China's image will be affected, in contrast to 28.8 percent of Chinese respondents. More than half (56.4 percent) of Chinese respondents believe that China's national image will not be shaken. For English respondents, only 16.3 percent believe that China's image will not be affected. A total of 26.3 percent for both responders replied with uncertainty if COVID-19 will affect China's national image (see Fig. 6).

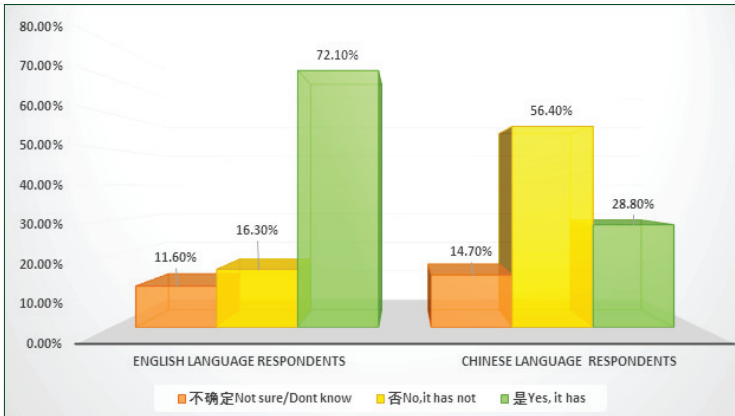


Fig. 6. China's National Image Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic

To understand further the perceived notions for the majority of Chinese Filipino as to where possible problems lie in China's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, a six-item choice was provided in the survey. The highest percentage from Chinese respondents scored 39.7 percent which believe that there are other factors or reasons beyond what was mentioned that contribute to problems in China's fight against COVID-19. Ranking the topmost reason for English respondents is a concern related to potential local doubt which is 44.2 percent. We also find that the second topmost reason for English respondents is poor communication with the local Chinese embassy at 41.90 percent, this reason ranks second from the lowest percentage among Chinese respondents with only 6.40 percent (see Table 2).

At this point, this survey result demonstrated further interaction between the role that language play in fostering better communication, thus providing a better outcome. We see here language acting as an important medium for sharing perceptual thoughts and ideas to provide the conditions that can influence a respondents' opinion.

Table 2. Possible Deterrent to China's Fight Against COVID-19

Possible Deterrents	English language	Chinese language
Poor communication with local Chinese embassy	41.90%	6.40%
Insufficient coordination among Chinese associations	37.20%	17.30%
Communication with the Chinese government is not smooth	30.20%	7.10%
Material transport is not smooth	25.60%	26.30%
A concern of potential local doubt	44.20%	25.60%
Beyond capacity	20.90%	4.50%
Other reasons	9.30%	39.70%

Palpating on participant's approval for adopting China's COVID-19 preventive strategies in their host country showed a high approval rate of 58.3 percent among the Chinese-language respondents. English respondents showed a varied opinion with both 34.9 percent for approval and disapproval rates (see Fig. 7).

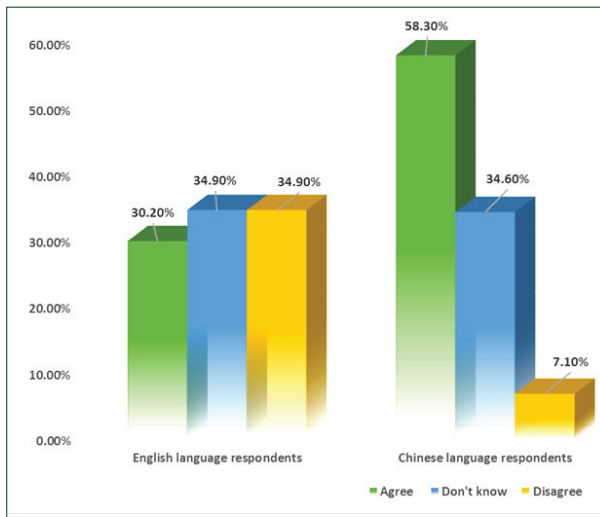


Fig. 7. Adopting China's COVID-19 Preventive Measures

Finding Analysis

Analysis of the survey data done in SPSS recorded a total of 439 respondents equally proportioned among English language and Chinese language participants. A higher percentage of English respondents are seen from ages 18 to 24 whereas the majority of Chinese respondents are aged 46 and older. However, no correlation was made between the age difference and response. Evident from this study is that participants gather their information and knowledge on China's fight to control the COVID-19 pandemic from media platforms of their choice, very much link to their language use. The results informed us that their succeeding decisions are the aftermath of information they have gathered from their own media choices link to their language use.

The overall result from the survey exhibited a high level of confidence among Chinese respondents with measures and strategies done by China to fight COVID-19. Responses gathered from English respondents show a parallel percentage between Scale 8 and 9 on China's performance as seen in Fig. 5. A parallel percentage response is also seen in Fig. 6 regarding adopting China's preventive measures. The overall response from English participants created the impression of staying in safe ground, of wanting to have positive confidence with China's COVID-19 preventive measures yet not in total agreement that it should be level up to a high grounds.

Therefore, it can be said that unlike Chinese respondents who have a 100 percent confidence towards China's measures, English respondents measure between 80 percent to 90 percent confidence level to China's COVID-19 preventive measures. The survey also shows that an inclination towards one form of media source influenced by language use. This reality is seen in Fig. 3 with English respondents turning to English Media as their major source of information while Chinese respondents rely on Chinese Media for their major source of information.

The Triad Link: Language, Media, and Perception

As this research deals with reactions to China's response in curbing the spread of COVID-19, it is especially important to elaborate on factors that influence perceptions translated to survey decisions made by participants. First of all, it is imperative to have a baseline definition of what is perception. According to Barber and Legge (2017) perception is about receiving, selecting, acquiring, transforming, and organizing the information supplied by our senses. In the research findings of Berelson and Steiner, perception is a complex process by which people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. From here, we draw a link that what is heard and seen from different media outlets transforms itself into elements that unconsciously influence one's emotion and reaction. Several previous studies have shown that the content of media not only helps identify perceptions, but also serves to direct public opinions since it is the primary source of information for the general public (Yaylaci and Karakus 2015).

From a psychological construct, perception is associated with attitude or emotion that share common properties that influence how humans understand the world around them and how they make decisions. The media appeals to its audience by representing the socially shared ideas and language of the whole community, these ideas and language are transformed into narratives of its own volition (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, and Baker 2008). Separating participants of this study based on language preference directs us to the type of media outlets they gather their information which are important influencers that cause perceptions to form or change. Researchers like Anderson and Pained (1975) argued that the interpretation of information is based on the perceptual process and in between is the "important link" that maneuvers

the response. In this study, the important link renders itself to the type of media choice influence by the language in operation. The language used in media provides an abstract medium by which cultural components are awakened that has the capacity for shaping worldviews. This entails the necessity to understand that our perception is partially shaped and prescribed by our traditions.

To understand the particulars of persuasion for a given culture is to understand how a particular culture establishes itself through its language. Here, we draw upon Bartlett's famous argument on the transmission of culture by "borrowing." Human perception is dominated by schematic thinking and psychological factors such as "borrowing" which meant that elements of culture are transmitted through the personal influence of some specific individual instincts or interests. The interesting factor makes an individual notice or assimilates special features in an alien environment, this tends to bring features into a working agreement with the already existing cultural possessions of his group. Along this line of leading that the interest of individuals is most open to the influence of a group that defines tendencies with his native community.

In this particular study, we can also see how language acts as a pulling mechanism in attracting a particular audience in the Chinese-Filipino community. It also shows that language provides a medium for exhibiting unconscious perceptual thoughts of individuals. Whorf (1956) proposed that an individual's conceptual knowledge was shaped by his or her language. The idea that language guides our cognition is demonstrated in this study in the choice of language and use of media platforms. It shows that language directs thoughts that influence one's choice and has a direct influence on one's perceptual experience. The choice of language serves as agents of influence in the natural world surrounded by media information.

In our present media-driven culture, the role of technological advances has largely increased the role of media in shaping public

opinion. Media plays a central role in informing the public about what happens in the world, particularly in those areas in which audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience. Davison (1983) claims that biased perceptions of media influence are the basis for social action and individual behavior and the choice of media is important because they affect a host of social and political behaviors. In the same manner, language use in media applies to the concept of trust stimulated by cultural borrowing and demonstrated through audience response. Therefore, the triad connection of language use and media consumption does influence one's perception.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a multitude of discussions and arguments around the world and the Chinese in the Philippines are no exception in its divided opinions. Different waves of migration contributed to the multi-layered identity of a Chinese Filipino which also contributed to varied dimensions of its affinity to China or the Philippines, as well as its linguistic ability. This also highlights the contrast of either being more comfortable getting information with either an all English media outlet or an all Chinese media outlet. The idea that media influence perception is not a new thing, however, this study establishes the connection that the language used in media is a crucial factor that can create a gap between perceptions among decision-makers. With a single reference point of information influenced by language use in media, sometimes the audience tends to have a "positively biased" or "negatively biased" view on certain issues. The result of establishing the relationship between language use and media acceptance used in the processing of perceptual information should compel us to focus on the essential role of

language and the social awareness fostered by media especially between the interplay of minority language and media acceptance. Media function as tools for language policing by setting agendas for language choice and usage, propagating language attitudes and ideologies, and providing spaces in which different language may or may not co-exist (Hult 2010).

Limitations

Although the research has reached its aims, there are some unavoidable limitations. First, because of the pandemic constrain, a face to face narrative interview isn't possible which could have concretized better the results acquired from the qualitative survey. The situation only allowed for an online survey which could have gathered a bigger sample size with a better network system. Therefore, the result from the sample may not adequately represent the opinions of the entire Chinese-Filipino population.

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